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UNCLAS ASUNCION 000261

SENSITIVE

FOR WHA/BSC AND DS/IP/ITA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BOMB EXPLODES AT SUPREME COURT BUILDING

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: At approximately 12:15 pm, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated at the Paraguayan Palace of Justice (Supreme Court). The explosion caused only minor property damage and no physical injuries. The building was quickly evacuated. RSO Asuncion assisted the Police with identification of the explosives and, at the request of the Minister of Interior, secured a sample for possible analysis by the FBI. At this point, there are no reliable reports of responsibility. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) DETAILS: At approximately 12:05 pm, a cleaning woman found a carton inside the women's bathroom in the basement of the Palace of Justice (Supreme Court building). The woman brought the package to the police office inside the building. The police officer opened the carton and saw a watch attached to cables surrounding plastic tubes. The officer showed another who told the junior officer to take the package outside. The officer placed the package in the nearby outdoor patio and as he walked away, it exploded. Nobody was injured.

¶3. (U) The building was quickly evacuated while the police conducted a full bomb search.

¶4. (U) The Paraguayan police special forces (FOPE) requested the assistance of the Regional Security Office to help determine the type of explosive used. At 3:00 pm, FSNI, ARSO and RSO went to the police crime analysis bureau with an Embassy Itemiser. While sampling several recovered pieces of the explosive device and torched plants, the Itemiser detected the presence of Nitro and RDX.

¶5. (U) Initial reports indicate that the device was likely built to attract attention rather than cause physical damage. The plastic tubes were empty and the explosive used was believed to be det cord.

¶6. (U) Minister of Interior Rafael Filizzola, Intelligence Chief Jose Amarilla and Police Commander Viviano Machado, among others, joined the RSO team at the Paraguayan National Police crime analysis division. At the request of the Minister of Interior and Comandante of Police, RSO took custody of a sample of the blast residue for possible analysis by the FBI.

¶7. (SBU) While in the office, the Police Commander received a call telling him that the Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) was responsible based on a pamphlet found in a local street market called Mercado Cuatro (NOTE: Mercado Cuatro is a dozen blocks from the scene of the explosion and although there may be some linkage to the EPP, the recovery of propaganda may prove to be unrelated). The Supreme Court President separately told the Ambassador that a pamphlet (NFI) had been found in the bathroom where the bomb was recovered.

¶8. (SBU) RSO, ARSO and FSNI were asked to stay in a meeting with Minister Filizzola, the Communications Minister Dos Santos, Chief of Intelligence Jose Amarilla, Police Commander Machado and other top police officials while they discussed their public response to the event. They decided that Minister Filizzola should hold an immediate press conference

where he should be firm, yet reassuring. Separately, the Supreme Court President displayed his defiance and anger to the Ambassador saying that they would not rest until those responsible are found "whoever they may be." He also told the Ambassador, as he had in their meeting a day earlier, that he had personally received seven threats this year.

19. (SBU) COMMENTS: Although it's too early to lay the blame at the feet of the EPP, the police are clearly looking for a quick scapegoat. Mentions of similarities to a 1999 IED detonation in the same building were made, but without further discussion. It appears the Government's early emphasis is on the management of public reaction within a population already feeling tremendously vulnerable - and skeptical about the police's ability to provide security.

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